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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000187

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY AFTER
CRACKDOWN ON ELECTION DEMONSTRATORS

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On March 1, Armenian President Robert Kocharian signed a decree declaring a state of emergency in the city of Yerevan. The state of emergency is to last until March 20, unless extended. It prohibits or limits any opposition political activity, independent news reporting, and certain activities of non-governmental organizations. Imposition of the state of emergency has been justified as necessary to maintain public order and security following violence in downtown Yerevan on March 1. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The state of emergency was signed by President Kocharian on the evening of March 1 (and ratified by parliament later the same night), after GOAM security units had evicted demonstrators from Freedom Square. The state of emergency order applies only in the capital, notwithstanding one report which had suggested that it might be expanded to cover the regions as well. The MFA confirmed to us that the edict is limited to the capital, and knew of no plans to expand the scope. Complete text of the decree is at paragraph 6.

¶3. (SBU) Kocharian justified the imposition of a state of emergency as necessary to maintain public order in the face of violent demonstrations. The GOAM has claimed that the opposition had showed no willingness to submit to calls for peaceful gatherings, and continued to display aggression and initiated acts of violence and vandalism.

WHAT THE STATE OF EMERGENCY ENTAILS

¶4. (SBU) The state of emergency is scheduled to last until March 20, though a March 1 press release from the MFA says it could be extended. Conversely, President Kocharian told the diplomatic corps March 2 he hoped to lift the state of emergency earlier if events warrant. Under the state of emergency, public rallies and demonstrations are prohibited, as are strikes. Police have been aggressively dispersing any group of pedestrians larger than about three or four, and pedestrians and vehicles are subject to random search. The GOAM reserves the right to restrict movement of individuals. The decree also bans distribution of leaflets, suspends activities of opposition political parties, authorizes the government to expel from Yerevan any non-residents it chooses, and restricts media reporting to that from official sources. Soldiers and police are posted throughout the city and on many roads, pulling over motorists for inspection. Last week, even before the state of emergency, police were already restricting access to Yerevan on the four major roads coming into the city.

¶5. (SBU) Elaboration on one point - the ban on public gatherings and demonstrations - was provided on March 2 by the Armed Forces Chief, Colonel-General Seyran Ohanyan. In a televised address to the nation he warned that his troops would react with severe authority at the "slightest" sign of public display of non-sanctioned gatherings. "I would like to warn all citizens that any attempt to organize or participate in events prohibited under the state of emergency would be adequately and strictly countered by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia. In particular, I am asking you to refrain from attempting to assemble in Yerevan even in small groups," adding that the army would exercise a no-tolerance policy against any discontent.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

¶6. (U) Following is the translated text of the government's state of emergency announcement:

"In Order to prevent the threat to the constitutional order in the Republic of Armenia and for the purpose of protecting the rights and legal interests of the population, guided by Point 14 of Article 55 and Point 6 of Article 117 of the Republic of Armenia Constitution, I decide:

- ¶1. To declare a state of emergency from March 1 to March 20, 2008 in the city of Yerevan
- ¶2. To reserve the leadership of the removal of circumstances serving as a basis for declaring the state of emergency and regulation and realization of other urgent issues to the President of the Republic of Armenia.

¶3. To reserve the legal provision of the regime of special rule to the Police of the Republic of Armenia subject to the Government of the Republic of Armenia and to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia;

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¶4. To establish the following temporary restrictions in the territory declared to be under the state of emergency:

- a) prohibition of meetings, rallies, demonstrations, processions and other mass events;
- b) prohibition of strikes and other events or actions that would hinder or stop the activities of organizations;
- c) if necessary, restriction by law-enforcement bodies of the movement of individuals, means of transportation and implementation of inspection;
- d) limitation of the reporting and coverage concerning the state and internal political issues by the means of mass media exclusively within the framework of the official press releases of the state bodies;
- e) prohibition of dissemination of news flyers and other types of political propaganda without the permission of the corresponding state bodies;
- f) temporary suspension of the activities of political parties and other nongovernmental organizations obstructing the removal of the circumstances serving as a basis for the declaration of the state of emergency.
- g) Expulsion of individuals who break the regime of the state of emergency and not residing in a given territory at the expense of their means, and if they don't have means - at the expense of the means of the Republic of Armenia state budget on the condition of the further return of the expenses made.

¶5. The Government of the Republic of Armenia must undertake the required measures for ensuring the accomplishment of the

present decree.

16. The present decree enters into force from the moment of the announcement.

PENNINGTON